

FLAT ROCK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

25486 GIBRALTAR ROAD,
P.O. BOX 337
FLAT ROCK, MICHIGAN 48134

734.782.5220 Museum Office
www.FlatRockHistory.org
Archives@FRDigitalHistory.org

MUSEUM CAMPUS HOURS

Office Hours Tues, Wed, Thurs 9am-noon
(its always best to call ahead)

Tours by appointment
or on scheduled Museum Open Houses

Please Note:
We are closed to the public in January.

2022- 2023 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Bruce Chapin, President
313.363.6338

Laura Polce, Vice-President

MargaretAnn Cooper, Treasurer

Lesley Gilliland Harkai, Recording Secretary
734.730.3213

Mary Washko, Corresponding Secretary
313.354.5125

Lila Fedokovitz, Historical Commission Liaison
989.786.3824

Jeff Groleau, Trustee
Rose Chambers, Trustee
Jean Whisler Walker, Trustee
Dawn Bartok, Trustee

OUR MISSION

The Flat Rock Historical Society seeks to preserve and communicate to residents and visitors the history and spirit of those who have lived in and near the City of Flat Rock from the beginning of human habitation, or its vision, to bring our community together for the enjoyment, discovery, and learning our past to create our future.

The TELEGRAPH

VOLUME XLIX Issue 2

SEPTEMBER 2023

First Families of Flat Rock: Hall & Littlefield Families

by Lesley Gilliland Harkai

*M*artha Merwin Smith Hall came to Gibraltar, Michigan from Cayuga, New York in 1833. She travelled with her five young children, Abigail, Edmund, Mary, Martha, Benjamin and her widowed mother, Elizabeth; leaving behind her husband Edmund Fanning Hall in New York. He had not been a good provider and would never come to Michigan; essentially abandoning his wife and children. They had very little cash and were coming to Flat Rock to join her two sisters, both of whom had married sons of Michael Vreeland.

Martha's sisters, Laura Smith had married Jacob Vreeland and Emma Barnes Smith had married James Vreeland before leaving New York. Both sisters had set up homesteads and raising their families in the wilderness of Michigan Territory. Both welcomed the extra hands of their mother Elizabeth and sister to help with their growing families.

Martha was a hard worker and took in mending and laundry to help her family stay fed. Her young children helped her establish a farm in Gibraltar where they sold the extra produce and dairy products for extra money. It was a meager existence, and her children wore homespun and patched shoes, but were always clean and polite.

Her oldest son Edmund wanted to go to college, he worked as a local school master and did odd jobs plastering to help raise the funds to put himself through Oberlin College in Ohio. While at Oberlin, Edmund got caught up in the anti-slavery movement and was a fierce orator on the evils of slavery, although, none of his family had owned any slaves. In 1844, he delivered the Commencement speech for his class and graduated with honors. He went on to join the Detroit Bar in 1847 and into practice with local lawyer, George E. Hand. Later in life, Edmund Hall will marry Mary Stoefflet Vreeland, the widow of his cousin Michael J. Vreeland, the youngest son of James and Emma Smith Vreeland Stoddard, and grandson of the Patriot.

Martha lost her mother Elizabeth Worth Smith Marsh in 1850 at the age of 76 years and she was buried in the Vreeland family cemetery. Martha's children all married into local families. Abigail married Henry Woodruff. Martha married George Hitchcock. Mary married Daniel Littlefield. Benjamin Hall married Frances Whitcomb. Edmund married Emeline Cochran.



Martha Merwin Smith Hall
1798 - 1865



Dear Flat Rock Historical Society Members,

Thank you very much for your support and donations to preserve the 1911 Reading Building. Sadly, we failed to convince the Flat Rock Board of Education to halt demolition. On June 19th this beautiful school was razed to a pile of bricks-112 years of history vanished in just 48 hours.

While we are heartbroken, we are proud of our efforts! We devised an all-star team of volunteers and professionals to institute a one-of-a-kind interactive museum for the children and families of Downriver. We educated and raised awareness about the importance of historical preservation, viability of rehabs, the financial and educational impact they have on a community like ours. We inspired voters to speak up and get involved when they don't agree with elected leadership. Our campaign to save Reading was truly unprecedented and we commend everyone for their contributions.

However, all is not lost. In an unlikely, yet fortunate twist of fate, we learned of another historic property imminently facing the same fate, this one by the city of Flat Rock. The 1866 home of Wesley Barnes Littlefield, Civil War Veteran, Postmaster and Justice of the Peace, is located at 26139 Gibraltar Road, in the heart of the Downtown Development District. The home was slated for demo within weeks for violation of city ordinances. Thanks to an extremely flexible property owner-one who empathized with our plight- and some awesome ground work by team members, we were able to convince the City to halt demo and are working diligently to devise a plan for the home's rebirth and the role it will have in our community.

Work has already commenced. Tyler Moll, historic preservationist, consulted with us on design and architectural direction. He educated us on the building phases of the home over time. We also want to thank Ted Kuderick & Deene Kuderick Stasko, childhood residents of the Littlefield home for their wealth of knowledge & photos provided.

We want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Flat Rock Historical Society and all the volunteers who sacrificed their time, expense and personal lives for the greater good of the region. Please stay tuned for more updates surrounding the plans for "The Littlefield House".

If you would like to follow the renovation, follow us on social media, or sign up for Restoring Reading's monthly newsletter at makehistory@restoringreading.org

JENNIFER SCHOENBERGER

404-272-0943

jenniferschoenbergerdesign.com

OCTOBER 2023

Halloween Open House

Thursday, October 19th

Costumes Encouraged - Rootbeer Floats

5-8pm

Event Chairperson: Jean Whisler

Museum Adult Ghost Walk/Tour

*in partnership with
the Michigan Paranormal Seekers Society*

Saturday, October 21st

6:30 - 11:30pm

Advance Tickets are \$20

Event Chairperson: Lesley Harkai

NOVEMBER 2023

Member's Meeting

Thursday, November 16th

5:30pm Fellowship Potluck (Bring a dish to pass)

7pm "Veterans Memorabilia Collection"

by Jeff Groleau Trustee, Flat Rock Historical Society

DECEMBER 2023

WINTERFEST TREE LIGHTING

Friday, December 1st

5:30 - 8pm

Volunteers Needed!

Member's Holiday Party

Thursday, December 14th

5:30 - 8pm

Dinner is catered.

Members are encouraged to bring an appetizer, side, or a dessert to share.

RSVP 734.782.5220

Kindly RSVP so that we may have an accurate count to the caterer and set up enough tables.

Event Chairperson: Rose Chambers

EVENT CANCELLED

Please NOTE the

2023 Diggin' Up Local History Cemetery Walk
has been CANCELLED due to lack of volunteers.
We can't host events without people who can commit.

FALL FLEA MARKET - SUNDAY, OCTOBER 1ST

Our Flat Rock Historical Society Fall Flea Market will be held on October 1st at the Speedway. Check our Facebook page for any last minute updates. As always we need your help. Dawn Bartok and Kathy Fisk, have volunteered to manage the Country Store during this Flea Market.

Members are asked to bring their home baked goods or monetary donations for the Country Store to the Hotel on Saturday, September 30th between 1 and 4 pm. It would be very helpful to have items individually wrapped if possible. We often run out of baked goods, so we depend on you!

Please let us know if you can help sell baked goods during the flea market. If you are going to visit the Flea Market on Sunday, please consider supporting the Historical Society's Country Store Booth at the Speedway. The proceeds from the baked goods go directly to the society supporting artifact conservation and historic programming. Thank you in advance!



BAKE SALE

GRATITUDE

*We would like to thank the following
(and hope we didn't miss anyone):*

To Jennifer Schoenberger, Hillary & George Rose, Bruce Chapin, Mike Sollars, Larry Dishaw, Heather Beitler, Charlene Coulson, Thom Roberts, Lila Fedokovitz for all the effort that went into trying to save the Reading Building.

To Stacy at Calder's Dairy for the Ice Cream donation for our Social. Root Floats never tasted so good!!

To Richard Porath for all the work on the caboose.

To Bruce Chapin and Jeff Grouleau for cleaning out the outdoor light fixtures.

To everyone who participated in the Memorial Day Parade and Melissa Murdoch for the wreath.

To the Soroptimists, for hosting the baby shower at the hotel and the generous donation.

To Cindy Fesko for the Lee Quilt.

To Laurie Lobdell Brown for the Case family afghan and vintage coke bottles.

To Susan Sickon for the Bean Pot.

To our gardener Jane for the lovely job on our gardens this year. They are beautiful!

To Lila, Bruce and Patty Chapin, and Mary Washko for helping to clean up the flood in Munger Basement after the storm.

S Congratulations to The Bear Clan BBC, Flat Rock's own Vintage Baseball Team on winning the World Tournament of Historic Baseball at Greenfield Village on August 13, 2023, and for debuting their new uniforms. We wish them the best of luck as they play their final game of the season at Bay City on September 23rd for the Michigan State Cup.



O Condolences to MargaretAnn Cooper, our Treasurer, on the loss of her mother.

Wishing Roberta Gonyea a speedy recovery!

C Wishing Judy Taylor a speedy recovery!

I We are looking for volunteers to help decorate the buildings for the Winterfest. And for help with the children's craft table at the event on December 1st.

E We appreciate the visit from Sarah Dreier and family. It was a pleasure to go over the Vreeland Family Tree and see our Roy Lee exhibit. We hope that with your help some of the photographs may be identified.

F Hoping Lila can sort out her car issues.



Welcome New Members!

Jessie Cowell - Lifetime

Palazzolo Family

Rose Chambers - Lifetime

Alger Family

Dennee Kuderik Stasko - Lifetime

Weinschenker Family

First Families of Flat Rock: Hall & Littlefield Families

by Lesley Gilliland Harkai

continued from cover

On 1860 census, we find Martha living with widowed daughter Mary Littlefield and her three sons, Wesley B., Cyrus, and Josiah. Edmund Fanning Hall, Martha's husband and the father of her children never made it to Michigan. He sent many letters trying to reconcile with his children, but only Edmund responded. When his father became too ill

to care for himself, he was taken in by some cousins in New York. They continuously wrote to Edmund on the decline of his father and asked for money for his care. When Edmund Fanning Hall died in 1864, none of his children returned for his funeral and he was buried in a corner of the church yard without a marker. His son received the bill for his final expenses.

Cyrus enlisted on August 19, 1861, with the 1st Cavalry Company K. Like many of his fellow soldiers, he contracted Typhoid Fever. He did survive the fever and was returned to duty, but his nervous system and brain were severely damaged from the fever. Cyrus was charged with desertion, but that charge was dropped. He was discharged on September 27, 1864, and transported to Detroit for further medical evaluation. His attending physician at the asylum writes the following in his record:

"He suffers from a form of mental disease known as chronic mania. He is under the control of fixed deliriums of suspicion [...] at intake. [...] He is unable to make a rational reply to any question and is at times impulsive and violent."

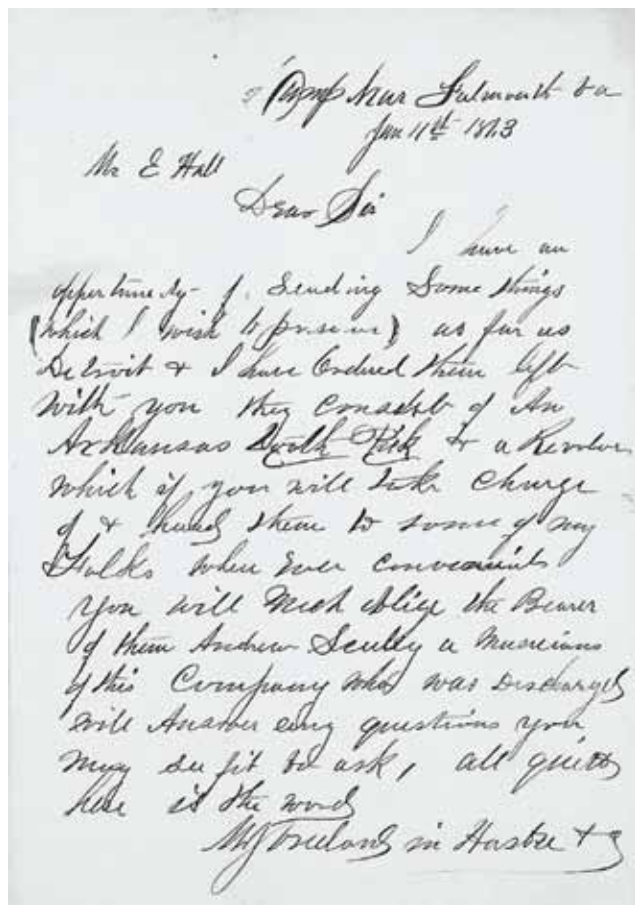
On April 11, 1865, just three days before President Lincoln was assassinated, Cyrus was transported to the Michigan Asylum for the Insane at Kalamazoo and later the Eastern Michigan Asylum at Pontiac for the Insane. Cyrus would remain institutionalized until his death in April 1918, fifty-three years after the end of the Civil

War!

Mary Littlefield was appointed Guardian for her son and received his pension money. However, Monroe County was paying his expenses from 1865-1878, after which the state of Michigan took over paying his bills until 1893, when an auditor finally noticed things did not add up. It was referred to the Special Examination, Law Division in DC for investigation.



Edmund Hall
1819 - 1903



Michael J. Vreeland to Edmund Hall, letter, 11 Jun 1863, 2 pages; Littlefield Family Papers, 1834-1935, call no. 8510Aa2;UAX; University of Michigan Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, MI.

"Camp Near Falmouth Va
June 11th 1863

Mr E Hall

Dear Sir
I have an

oppertunity of sending Some things
(which I wish to preserve) as far as
Detroit & I have ordered them left
with you they consist of An
Arkansas Walk-Pick [?] & a Revolver
which if you will take charge
of & hand them to some of my
Folks when ever convient
You will much oblige the Bearer
of them Andrew Scully a Musicians
of this Company who was discharged
will answer any questions you
may see fit to ask, all quiet
here is the word

M J Vreeland in Habsburg



Mary Hall Littlefield
1817 - 1900

Mary had received over \$17,000 between 1865 and 1893 in pension funds for Cyrus, which in today's dollars was about \$320,000. She had moved to Ann Arbor with her youngest son Josiah and was helping to pay his way through the University of Michigan. She was unable to come up with an acceptable accounting of the pension funds, even going so far as to have her brother Edmund try to come up with accounting that the government would accept. Mercifully, Mary Littlefield died on May 10, 1900, just weeks away from federal prosecution.

Wesley was appointed guardian of his brother Cyrus after his mother's death and had inherited a mess of pension investigations and asylum bills. The government still wanted the excess pension that Mary had drawn returned and even though he did not receive any of his brother's pension, he still had to work through the demands including over \$90,000 with of inheritance tax that the government said he owed after his mother passed!

Wesley had also served during the war, he was with the 1st Michigan Cavalry company M for only nine months at the close of the war. He was not injured and returned home to Flat Rock.

He worked at many jobs and was the Postmaster and Justice of the Peace for Flat Rock. His uncle Edmund had started to expand into the lumber business and Wesley travelled to Wisconsin, where he met Blanche Maynard his future wife. Wesley brought his bride back to Flat Rock and began work on building them a home. This house is the

"Littlefield House" that Jennifer Schoenberger has started to restore. Wesley and Blanche had two children.

One died in infancy and the other, Frank, died at the age of twelve.

Blanche Littlefield died in 1910. Wesley remarried in 1912 to Evangeline Agnes Swan, who was twenty-two years his junior. Wesley succumbed to pneumonia in January

1914. His wife Evangeline continued to own the

property for several years afterwards as she did not pay taxes because she was the widow of a Civil War veteran.

Josiah Littlefield became the guardian of his brother Cyrus after Wesley died. Mercifully, Wesley had managed to sort out the bulk of the problems and Josiah easily took over until Cyrus passed in 1918.

Josiah is pictured to the left with his family. His mother, Mary Littlefield is to the left of his shoulder. His daughter Ellen is on his left in the dark dress. The photo is dated 1897 and likely taken at his residence in Farwell, Michigan.

Note: Information for this article was sourced from the Pension File of Cyrus Littlefield and personal family letters found at the Bentley Library.



Wesley Barnes Littlefield
1840 - 1914



Caboose Update

by Mary Washko

You may have noticed a man working on our caboose located in the Community Park. It is Richard Porath, long time member



and expert on all things D.T.&I. Yep, our old girl is getting a facelift. Mr. Porath did his magic the first time around with repairs, cleaning and painting. But, it's been a few years since then and he said he wanted to do it one last time. Each

board was taken off and new cedar boards were bought from the Amish in Gladwin, Michigan, specially cut to size and painted individually. New windows replaced the old ones with the help of lifetime member Larry Dishaw. There is still more work to be done on the Cuppola and roof.



"Old 94" was built in 1925 at Butler, Pennsylvania by the Standard Steel Car Co. for the Detroit, Toledo & Ironton Railroad. It was one of forty new cabooses Henry Ford commissioned for his new electrified railroad. Of these, Flat Rock's "Old 94" and the one at the Henry Ford are believed to be the only two cabooses left. Caboose #94 is thirty feet long and weighs 41,300 pounds, and was donated to the city in June 1977 at the request of Mayor Ted Anders. Constructed of pine, the caboose contained a stove, wash basin and a bench that sat six workers and sits on a thirty-five foot stretch of rails.

In Pursuit of designating Flat Rock a Certified Local Government (CLG) and the creation of a Historic District Study Committee

by Lesley Gilliland Harkai

The Certified Local Government (CLG) is a program jointly administered by the National Park Service (NPS) and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) that helps promote historic preservation initiatives in local communities, provides resources such as survey assistance, and opportunities for funding.

The Flat Rock Historical Commission submitted our initial application this past Spring and received directives from SHPO for a few minor wording changes to better clarify and align our existing ordinance with Michigan's Historic Districts Act, Public Act 169 of 1970. The requested changes have been made by the city attorney, submitted to city council and are awaiting their approval. We fully expect to obtain our CLG Status before the end of the year.

After the historic Reading Building was demolished at the express directive of Andrew Brodie and the Flat Rock School Board, it became abundantly clear that we needed to inventory and assess our remaining historic properties. A Historic District Study Committee has been selected by the chair of the Historical Commission, assembled and is currently awaiting the mayor and city council to confirm the selected committee members. An initial list of historic properties in Flat Rock has been identified and preliminary research on these sites has started.

In Memoriam

Marcia Jean Whisler

(February 8, 1948 - May 3, 2023)



It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of member Marcia Whisler, who passed away on May 3, 2023. Beloved wife of Daniel Whisler. Marcia was a part of Arbor Hospice and Children with Hair Loss. She was a Methodist Church quilter, enjoyed water exercise, and gardening.

Betty Bates Whisler

(March 10, 1925 - June 12, 2023)

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of long time member and volunteer, Betty Jean Whisler, age 98, who passed away on Monday, June 12, 2023.

Born on March 10, 1925 in Napoleon, Ohio, she was the daughter of Henry and Callie (Russell) Bates. On June 24, 1944 she married David Wayne Whisler at First United Methodist Church, Flat Rock. Betty was a member of Flat Rock First United Methodist Church, Flat Rock Historical Society; Rainbow girl; Den mother for Cub Scouts Pack #10; worked on the Flat Rock Election Board; worked with Remedial Reading at Barnes Elementary School; was a Rosie the Riveter at Willow Run Airport.



Kurt Kersten

(October 28, 1923- August 15, 2023)



It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Kurt Kersten, Lifetime Member on August 15, 2023 at the age of 99.

Kurt was born in Highland Park, MI in 1923 to Gustave and Elsa (Schneider) Kersten. Kurt's father, a skilled machinist, immigrated to Detroit to find employment in the new automobile industry. The family eventually settled in Flat Rock, where Kurt's father worked at Ford Motor Company.

In 1943, Kurt volunteered for the Army Air Corps and assigned to the 446th bomb group in Bungay, England. He served as a navigator.

In 1947 Kurt married his high school sweetheart, Lenore Kott. Kurt earned a BA degree from Michigan State University and a law degree from the Detroit College of Law, and practiced law in Flat Rock for 33 years. In 1986 Kurt was elected to serve as a district judge in 33rd District Court, Woodhaven. Kurt was especially proud of his service with the Downriver Michigan Veterans Honor Guard.

Flat Rock Historical Society Membership Application

Today's Date _____

☐ New Member ☐ Renewal Membership No. _____

Name

Street Address

City

State

ZIP

@

Email 1 Address

@

Email 2 Address

(____) _____ - _____
Telephone #

☐ Landline
☐ Cell
☐ Texting

Please tell us a little about your connection
to Flat Rock or interests on the line above.

CHOOSE ONE:

- ☐ \$10 Individual Annual Dues (July-June)
- ☐ \$15 Family Annual Dues (July-June)
- ☐ \$5 Student Membership
- ☐ \$100 Life Membership (per person)

Make checks payable to: "FRHS"
Mail application & check/money order to:

Flat Rock Historical Society
PO Box 337
Flat Rock, MI 48134

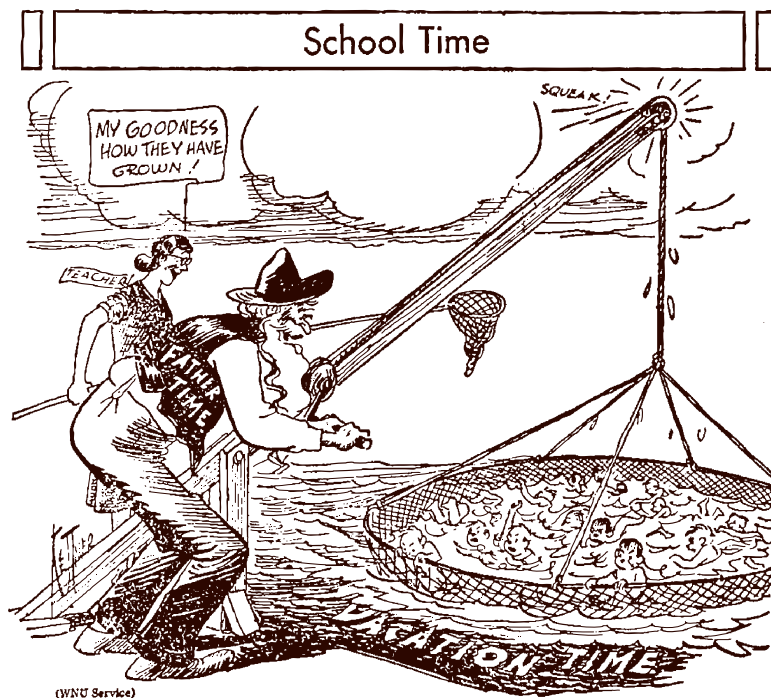
For Office Use Only:

☐ Scan ☐ PastPerfect ☐ MailChimp



Postage
Here

The Last Laugh: Vintage Cartoons from the Hometown Paper



"School Time" *The Huron Valley Sentinel* (Flat Rock),
12 Sept 1941, p. 1.

MUSEUM UPDATES

Our Museum Office is located on the lower level of the Munger Store and (at least at this stage) is open by appointment. We have been given clearance by the city to allow for volunteers to work onsite and we have a number of major exhibit resets that we are working on.

Additionally, we are working on cataloguing items into our new web database system. This is potentially something that could be done from home if anyone has a computer and would like to volunteer their time. Please call the museum for a volunteer application and additional details.

PICTORIAL HISTORY OF FLAT ROCK

The Flat Rock book published by Arcadia Publishing is still available for \$22 from the Museum Gift Shoppe. Books are also available at the Blue Heron Trading Company in downtown Flat Rock or by calling the museum office 734.782.5220.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES

Annual membership dues are due now! If you haven't paid your dues for the 2023-2024 year. Our membership year mirrors our fiscal year July 1st - June 30th. Dues can be mailed, brought to the museum office, given to any board member. We are working to restore the online link for membership as well. Thanks to you all!!!